

May 14, 2015

My name is Shawn Bultsma, and I am a school counselor educator and practicing school counselor with 25 years experience in education including 15 years as a school counselor at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. I currently work as a school counselor where I model counseling skills for my graduate students.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition of this bill. I would like to clarify that my opposition to HB 4552 that has been posted on the committee's webpage does not represent my support for status quo. In fact, I think there are some steps that have been taken as well as other steps that can happen to achieve the goals of this legislation without mandating courses or additional proficiency assessments.

I would like to highlight the barriers to success that are highlighted in a 2014 report by the Joyce Ivy Foundation

(<https://www.joyceivyfoundation.org/docs/Joyce%20Ivy%20Foundation%202014%20Michigan%20High%20School%20Counselor%20Report.pdf>) in which Michigan school counselors have identified three barriers to their work: (1) counselor caseloads are too high, (2) other duties routinely detract from counseling time (administering standardized tests, monitoring lunchrooms, substitute teaching), and (3) counselors do not have enough information, knowledge, training and/or opportunities to participate in professional development.

Authors of this report concluded,

we believe that substantive gains can be made immediately by addressing the barriers outlined above. Reducing extraneous duties and granting counselors the time to participate in professional development opportunities are initial steps that require very little additional financial investment. To reverse the trend of increasing counselor caseloads, Michigan needs to increase the number of counselors and effectively utilize counseling technologies. Post-secondary planning is only growing more complex, and students need the best information and counseling possible.

The following excerpts from testimony gathered by the Michigan Association of College Admission Counselors (MACAC) supporting HB 4552 confirm that supporters of this bill recognize that the problem is much larger than training.

Ms. Wynn, a Career Development Facilitator states, "The counselors do not have enough time in their day (with testing and scheduling demands) to see all of the seniors who have questions about colleges."

Ms. Skelly writes, "I also encourage a reduction in case loads above the ACA recommended 250/counselor and a requirement that counselors not be given test administration duties."

Ms. Kurtz writes, "Until the powers that be can assure counselors their caseload will become realistic, the chaotic nature of counseling in the high school will not change."

Unfortunately, as I highlighted in my previously submitted testimony, HB 4552 does little to address these barriers. The only barrier that this bill addresses is redundant with recent developments in the training of school counselors in the Michigan Department of Education and the Michigan College Access Network. As detailed in the testimony that I submitted, the Michigan Department of Education revised the standards for the professional preparation of school counselors. These revisions include training in college and career readiness for all school counselors as well as a new assessment designed to determine proficiency in the area of college and career readiness as presented in the appendix of the testimony that I submitted last week when I appeared to provide testimony.

Additionally, the Michigan College Access Network (MCAN) has provided professional development for school counselors to support college readiness counseling. MCAN has also partnered with several universities to improve their programs in this area. I applaud these efforts and encourage more of them. My program at Grand Valley State University has benefited from this partnership and although we have not dedicated a course in college readiness counseling, we have included this content across our curriculum using many of the MCAN resources. Evidence of this training is provided in the following letter from one of our recent graduates (letter from Jessica Marzi).

It is unfortunate that MCAN does not highlight these changes to our program in its public relations. Instead, MCAN has circulated misinformation about the training of school counselors. For example, MCAN leadership fails to mention that Eastern Michigan University has required this training of all candidates since 2009 and focuses on the compelling headline that only Western Michigan University and Wayne State University are offering these classes. Not mentioned is that GVSU and University of Detroit Mercy include college readiness counseling coursework rather than dedicated classes. Not mentioned is that Eastern Michigan University offers an entire online certificate program in this area. Perhaps that does not generate as much support for MCAN's special interest?

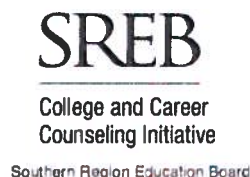
When asked why MCAN was focused solely on the issue of training when it is clear that the problem also has to do with counselor caseloads and inappropriate duties, the executive director shared that these issues were not priorities of her board. I find that unfortunate and unacceptable. It must be very perplexing to this committee why it is that MACAC and MCAN can be on one side of this issue while the Michigan School Counselor Association (MSCA) is on the other. What explains these postures? That I cannot answer particularly because MSCA has not been approached to collaborate on solutions the barriers discussed in the Joyce Ivy Foundation Report; however, I recently received a unified national organization statement from the national associations of these three bodies (appendix) along with several other professional organizations (e.g.,

American Counseling Association, The College Board, and the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs). I am hopeful that if given the time and opportunity these state organizations can work together to recommend some positive steps to support college and career readiness of all students in Michigan to insure the workforce and talent development of all k-12 students.

Respectfully submitted,

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Appendix



The national organizations represented at the SDSU White House convening believe in the right of every student to have access to counseling and advisement for postsecondary (career and education) preparation, access and success. The organizations further acknowledge the diversity of professionals who serve students in this regard, including school counselors, advisors, and other professionals, each with different specialized training, skills and competencies.

However, the national organizations agree that there are common prerequisites for the effective delivery of counseling and advisement for postsecondary preparation, access and success, including:

- 1.) A commitment to collaboration among professionals in service to students;
- 2.) Cultural competence and the ability to work with all students, including students who are currently underserved and underrepresented.
- 3.) Proficiency in the use of data to assist in identifying, designing, implementing, and evaluating policies and practices related to counseling and advising students for post secondary access and success.
- 4.) Training in both the theory and practice of advising students for postsecondary access and success.

As a direct outcome of the White House convening, the national organizations in attendance agree to commit to the formation of a collaborative council, effective immediately, to achieve the following short-term goals:

- 1.) Conduct a comprehensive multi-organizational, multi-institutional asset map of competencies, knowledge/skillset requirements, and resources for advising students for postsecondary access and success.
- 2.) Identify other concrete priorities for the council to address, including, but not limited to, advocacy, research and communication to policymakers and administrators on behalf of counseling and advising professionals.